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BIOGRAPHICAL

MEMOIRS

OF

WILLIAM GED;

INCLUDING

A PARTICULAR ACCOUNT

OF

HIS PROGRESS IN THE ART

OF

B L O C K - P R I N T I N G.

LONDON,
PRINTED BY AND FOR J. NICHOLS,
MDCCLXXXI.

1836

ADVERTISEMENT.

TO the ſimple and unvarniſhed tale here laid before the Reader, no formal Introduction is neceſſary. The Editor expects from it neither fame nor profit. The only ſhadow of merit which he can claim is, the having reſcued from oblivion ſome authentic documents of an ingenious though unſucceſsful invention, and ſome fugitive memoirs of the inventor and his family.

The firſt part of the pamphlet is printed from a MS. dictated by the elder WILLIAM GED, ſome little time before his death, for the ſatisfaction of his relations. The ſecond part was written by his daughter; to whoſe benefit the profits of this publication (if any ſhall ariſe) will faithfully be applied. The third part is lite-

rally copied from ſome Propoſals publiſhed by JAMES GED in 1751, in a half ſheet in 4to. The Narrative of Mr. MORES is annexed, to complete the ſubject.

J. N.

July 12, 1781.

I. Mr.

I. Mr. WILLIAM GED'S NARRATIVE OF HIS SCHEME FOR BLOCK-PRINTING.

Dictated by himself some time before his Death, for the Satisfaction of his Relations.

I HAPPENED in the year 1725 to be in company with a printer, who, talking of the loss our nation was at for want of a letter-founder, and after shewing me the nature of the types singly and composed in pages, asked me, if I could contrive a method to remedy that defect. I answered, That I judged it more practicable for me to make plates from the composed pages than make single types. To which he replied, That if such a thing could be done, an estate might be made by it. I desired he would give me a page for an experiment, which, after some days trial, I found practicable, and so continued for near two years improving on my invention; and making a great many experiments, several of which were expensive; but the more I practised, and the less chargeable materials I used, I was the more successful, till at last I brought it to bear, as that no distinction could be made between the impression from my plates and that from the types.

I then applied to a Gentleman in this place, who had five or ſix thouſand pound ſtock, and who for a fourth ſhare of the profits contracted with me to advance all the money that might be neceſſary for carrying on the work. But this Gentleman, afterwards converſing with a certain other printer in this town, was made to believe that £ 8000 would not bring that undertaking to perfection; which did ſo intimidate him, that in two years continuance of that contract, he made no farther advance to me than £ 22. So finding no appearance of ſucceſs that way, I was glad of any opportunity by which I might expect better encouragement.

In July 1729, William Fenner, a London ſtationer, being by accident here in Edinburgh, hearing of my project, made me propoſals more diſadvantageous than my former bargain, which however I accepted of. He claimed the half of the profits, in conſideration he was to advance all the money requiſite, and that I ſhould procure my former partner's renounciation of any farther concern with me in that affair; which being obtained, we entered into a contract for twenty-one years, by which I was obliged to communicate to him the art.

On his part he was obliged, four months after date, to have a proper houſe and all materials in readineſs at London, where I engaged to be by that time; and theſe conditions under a penalty of £ 1000 to be forfeited by the party failing. There was likewiſe a clauſe in that contract, that, if in eight months after trial, my project ſhould not prove advantageous, becauſe

becauſe of the oppoſition it might likely meet with from the printers, in ſuch event the contract was to be void and null.

I implemented my part by being at London within the time limited, where I found Mr. Fenner had nothing agreed on provided, and I believe was as little capable. But being a ſtranger to his circumſtances, he made me believe, the reaſon of this delay was, that he had got acquainted with a letter-founder, who would, for one 16th ſhare from each of us, furniſh all the different types ſhould be wanted; upon which followed another contract, and we were accordingly furniſhed with two parcels of different types: but when we came to uſe them, we found them altogether unfit for our purpoſe; and were likewiſe informed, that he had been formerly employed by the King's printers, but was rejected by them, becauſe one Caſlon had eclipſed him in his buſineſs, which occaſioned his applying to me, believing he could make a living by the profits he expected from his ſhare in my project. Thereafter having ſeen a Bible printed in the King's-houſe in London on a beautiful letter, I applied to them, to know if they would give ſuitable encouragement to furniſh them with plates for a Bible from that type. Accordingly a day was appointed to hear our propoſals: in the mean time they acquainted their new founder Caſlon, who told them he would give us fifty guineas, if we, in half a year's time, made one page of a Bible from that type. Our appointment holding, we made demands, and they made offers of money, and we believed

we might have agreed; but at the ſame time told us of the above fifty guineas, and that the gentleman who had made the offer was in the houſe; being called into our company, he bragged much of his great ſkill and knowledge in all the parts of mechaniſm, and particularly vaunted, that he, and hundreds beſides himſelf, could make plates to as great perfection as I could; which occaſioned ſome heat in our converſation, and which was diverted by a propoſal of Mr. Baſket, That Caſlon and I ſhould each of us have a page given us, to make a plate from, of that type, between then and that day ſe'nnight; and that he who failed ſhould give an handſome entertainment to the company: this being agreed to, Mr. Thomas Gib, overſeer of the printing-houſe, was appointed judge of the performance.

Next day, about dinner time, each of us had a page ſent us. I imeadiately after fell to work, and by five o'th'clock that ſame afternoon I had finiſhed three plates from that page, and cauſed to take impreſſions from them on paper, which I and partners carried directly to the King's printing-houſe, and ſhowed them to ſaid Mr. Gib, who would not believe but theſe impreſſions were taken from the type; whereupon I produced one of the plates, which, he ſaid, was the types ſoldered together, and ſawed thorough. To convince him of his miſtake, I took that plate from him, and broke it before his face, then ſhowed him another, which made him cry out, He was ſurprized at my performance, and then called us to a bottle of wine; when he purpoſed I

ſhould

ſhould take eleven pages more, to make up a form, that he would ſee how it might anſwer the ſheet-way. My too expeditious performance here proved rather a detriment then advantage to me, as I came afterwards to underſtand from the King's printers themſelves; who having acquainted Mr. Caſlon with what had happened, he declined keeping the appointment in perſon, but ſent a ſon of Mr. Baſket's to tell, "That he could not perform the thing himſelf, neither could he get one of the hundred he ſpoke of "to undertake it."

Thomas James, the letter-founder above-mentioned, our partner, having a brother an architect, who was univerſally acquainted with the nobility and dignified clergy, he gave him one of theſe plates, and informed him of my above performance. Mr. James handed the plate about, till he came to the earl of Macclesfield, who told him, That there was a vacancy in the univerſity of Cambridge, who would be glad to receive us, and let us have the privilege of printing Bibles and Prayer-books; which motion took. So John James the above architect, and my partner Fenner, went down to Cambridge, where their propoſals were readily agreed to. But, before this time, I ſuſpected much the ſufficiency of my partner's circumſtances, which made me tell, That I inclined to leave them at the term of the eight months; which John James hearing, being a man of ſubſtance, made an overture, to divide in four ſhares, and that he would make the fourth partner; that he would lay me down £100; that I ſhould have

yearly £ 100 paid me for the uſe of my family, beſides thirty ſhillings weekly for my own ſubſiſtence; that I ſhould be præſes of the company; and that any one of the other three partners, who joined voice with me, ſhould determine the queſtion; and that, laſtly, he would uſe his intereſt with the univerſity of Cambridge, that I ſhould have their privilege for printing the before-mentioned books in my plate-way. Which conditions I went into, and had the ſaid £ 100 laid me down.

We had ſeveral meetings at making up this contract; which being agreed to in the terms above, was put into hands of counſellor Hamilton, to be extended at large. Mean while the King's printers, having heard our deſign, applied to the univerſity, and made an offer of £ 500 more than what they had agreed to take from us. Afterwards Thomas James, our letter-founder, fell to intriguing with the King's printers (who underſtanding the countenance we were likely to obtain from the univerſity of Cambridge, which was equal to their own as to the privilege of printing Bibles and Prayer-Books; and the more afraid, of having a man of ſuch ſubſtance as John James his brother partner with us) in order to withdraw his brother, which afterwards appeared he had undertaken to do. The argument they made uſe of to ſpirit him up (we having complained of the inſufficiency of his types) was, to make him believe that the fault lay in my plates only, and not in his types, though they had been formerly rejected by themſelves: wherefore, to convince his brother of

ignorance

ignorance or malice, I made impreſſions from both type and plate, in the manner following; viz. Having at that time five or ſix ſheets of an octavo Prayer-book in plates made from the ſame types, I cauſed to make up a ſheet, where pages of plate were intermixed with pages of type; and having twenty ſuch ſheets to caſt off, I aſked him, before his brother, to diſtinguiſh which was plate, and which type. To do which, he divided the one half of theſe ſheets from the other, ſaying, the one was plate, and the other half type, whereas each of theſe ſheets bore a mixture of pages, half one, half other. I made a ſecond trial, on Thomas James's bringing two paragraphs of a different ſize of letter, compoſed in Latin, which he deſired to be caſt off with care, being to be ſent to the country for a ſpecimen. Obſerving this to be a better type than what he had furniſhed us, I cauſed to make up as much of our letter as would make a folio-page, joined with theſe two ſpecimens, from which I made a plate, and cauſed to throw off a parcel of ſheets from both, which being brought to him, he miſtook the one for the other; but carried one of each home with him, and next day he diſcovered a ſmall open in the tail of one ſingle letter, whereby he was afterwards capable to diſtinguiſh that plate from the type: for which reaſon I made another plate from the ſame compoſed page, and cauſed caſt-off an equal number from the laſt plate as from the former; and the impreſſions being mixt and laid before him, he diſcovered his ignorance, by affirming that all the impreſſions of my laſt plate were

taken

taken from the types (not finding that chaſm or open in a letter of the former plate), till I convinced him of his error by ſhowing him the other plate. Not long after this, Mr. Samuel Palmer (the moſt knowing printer in London), who had frequently ſeen my performance in the plate-way, aſſured me, that the types I was uſing were altogether unfit for my purpoſe; and further, he and another gentleman told us, they heard our letter-founder ſay, That as long as he was our letter-founder, we ſhould never hurt the trade, and it was for that reaſon he had joined us in company. Having wrought about eighteen months at London on ſeveral books with theſe imperfect types, which proved naught, and the leaſe never yet obtained, though the univerſity ſent letters every two or three weeks to John James our partner at Greenwich, directed to the care of his brother the letter-founder at London, who, being in uſe of breaking-open theſe letters, kept up a material one, wherein the univerſity deſired us to take counſel, and talk with their agent at London, to whom they had ſent their papers and powers. Next meeting, inſtead of communicating the contents of this letter to the concerned, he told them, He had ſeen a gentleman, who ſaid the gentlemen of the univerſity were ſurprized we had ſo long delayed coming down to Cambridge to take out our leaſe, which they were ſo willing to grant us, and propoſed to his brother and Mr. Fenner to go down in name of the company, which they had agreed to before I came. When they told me what had paſſed, I, knowing

ing the man's ſincerity, which I had obſerved for ſome time before, thought it not convenient without I went along with him; and then told them, I could endeavour to procure the recommendation of my Lord Iſlay and others of my countrymen: and accordingly I obtained my Lord Iſlay's letter to Mr. Smith, profeſſor of the opticks in Trinity College, who happened to be præſes at that meeting, called Syndicks. This letter I delivered by myſelf, when this gentleman aſked me what advice I had from counſel about their privileges; which was the firſt time I had heard any thing of the contents of the above-mentioned letter from the univerſity. This being a farther confirmation of this man's treachery, I let Mr. Smith know my former jealouſies of him; and, ſince he was præſes, I begged of him to call a meeting before I left this place, that I might know their opinions; and accordingly being met, they granted our requeſt for paying into the univerſity £100 yearly, and five pounds *per annum* to one Jonathan Plinder, an old decayed printer in that place. I told Thomas James, I was informed ſuch a letter was ſent by the univerſity to his brother, to take advice of counſel as it directed, and was much ſurprized he had concealed the contents from the company; when he anſwered, he did not know the uſe of it. I deſired him to go along with me to thank the gentlemen of the univerſity, which he refuſing, I told him I would go alone then; but ſeeing me poſitive, we went in company; when he, with no little aſſurance, aſked them, That if my project

ſhould miſgive, were we obliged to pay them an hundred guineas yearly? and farther he doubted of the validity of their leaſe. To both which they anſwered, We had to do with gentlemen; and then we got their decree ſigned unanimouſly. When we came to London, I acquainted my other partners with my ſucceſs at Cambridge, and Thomas James's behaviour and concealment of the forementioned letter. His brother took him heartily to taſk; who told me how he had chaſtiſed him, and got his promiſe of better behaviour for the future. Then we reſolved to go all together to Cambridge, to attend two other courts, called Caput and Convocation, to get the finiſhing ſtroke to their leaſe. We appointed a day to ſet out; but Thomas James thought fit to inform the King's printers (our antagoniſts) of our reſolutions, who had been at Cambridge two days before we arrived, and had renewed their former offer of £500 to the univerſity, beſides an yearly premium; and the more to ingratiate themſelves, carried along with them ſpecimens of Caſlon's types, to ſhew the imperfection of Thomas James's, as were exhibited before himſelf, when he was obliged to own there was no compariſon: but, having an impreſſion of that plate with me I had formerly made from Mr. Caſlon's types, made it plain, my work muſt be always anſwerable; which the gentlemen being convinced of, our leaſe paſſed the other two courts next day. The univerſity being confined to make that grant only in the name of one ſingle perſon, we were aſked which of us ſhould be nominated; when Fenner and

Thomas

Thomas James ſtood candidates, and, by the power given me of the caſting vote, I gave it in favour of Fenner, who promiſed, as ſoon as he came to London, to make a transference to the whole concerned; but no ſooner we returned thither, than there was a propoſal made to ſend Thomas James to Holland to purchaſe proper types, which was accordingly done, when in two months ſtay there, he brought upon us a charge of £160, and only one ſet of types home with him, though in greater quantity then he had either orders or we uſe for. Having heard me frequently ſay, that the beſt plates I could make would be from types before they were uſed or inked, he cauſed to ſet up four pages of a Bible, to make a plate from them, before any impreſſion had been taken from them. The impreſſions were made, when there appeared like two hundred blots in each page, which he was ſo fond of, that he carried them directly to his brother. Being ſurprized, I cauſed take impreſſions likewiſe from the types, when the ſame number of blots appeared there too: and when the compoſitors obſerved the types, they told me, that about a third of them had never been adjuſted; then James himſelf was ſet to adjuſt them. After this, I made a whole ſheet of a Bible, and impreſſions were taken from both type and plate; when Thomas James brought a quire of fine paper, and was preſent at the impreſſion taken from the type, and placed his ſeal on the middle of each ſheet. Seeing his eagerneſs to catch advantages, I went for a quire of the ſame kind of paper, and deſired him to be witneſs to the

impreſſion from my plates; and having ſtamped my ſeal likewiſe on each ſheet of mine, both impreſſions were ſhewn to Samuel Palmer and his brother, who were ſatisfied with the performance. This was ſomewhat grating to Thomas James. The next malicious ſtratagem he fell upon (being witneſs to the taking of theſe impreſſions) was, to acquaint his brother with the defect of the impreſſions in the corner of one of the ſheets, which he had picked out on purpoſe, which defect was owing to the platten's being patched with paper; but as his was firſt caſt off, there were more of them injured in that particular place than of mine; which ſhewing his brother, and convincing him of his malice to the undertaking, he conſented that he ſhould have no farther concern, or be allowed to come to our meetings, which occaſioned the delay of our contract, and conſequently of the transference, not knowing whether he was to be any more a partner. Then we got compoſitors, and ſet to work about a Bible and two Prayer-books on that letter brought from Holland; two Prayer-books upon a Brevier letter, which we had from Thomas James, which were laid aſide after four ſheets were made in plates; and likewiſe an octavo Prayer-book, whereof nine ſheets were made, and likewiſe thrown aſide, which afterwards, when I left them, they completed in the common way. I made likewiſe plates for a Grammar, when my partners made choice of an overſeer, who did not underſtand the rudiments. At this time we had about a dozen compoſitors, and finiſhed two Prayer-books, without taking

taking an impreſſion of one ſheet; being obliged to make two plates for each page (and very often a greater number, till he was ſatisfied that he had got two ſufficient for the work): this learned overſeer was made judge, to break down what he thought convenient to be caſt over again; but his judgement ſhewed itſelf in breaking the beſt, which I frequently diſcovered, and ſhewed him the plates after broke, to give him reaſon to be convinced of his error; though all the excuſe he made for himſelf was, that there were faults in the compoſing, which ſhould have been his buſineſs to have known before they were brought to me. Having obſerved this practice ſo frequently, I made my complaint to Mr. Fenner, that impreſſions might be taken of the whole work, to ſee how far we had been impoſed on: Fenner not ſeeming to agree to it, ſurprized me much, my demand being ſo juſt. A little after I came to diſcover, that there was an underſtanding between Fenner and this overſeer, who was likewiſe clerk to the diſburſements, of which John James bore the far greater ſhare, without ever taking receipts or clearing accompts with Fenner, who had his game to play with this clerk in making up the accompts; as he told me afterwards, that he had a promiſe of fifty pounds from Fenner, to make up the accompts as he ſhould direct, and to continue him in his favour; and he added, that it was then in his power to diſcover to me, how far Fenner deſigned to trick and play the rogue both againſt John James and me. But having in due acquainted Mr. James with my obſervations

and ſuſpicions of this overſeer, we determined to employ a more proper man, to whom we would allow double the wages that the other had. Accordingly another was got, who ſeeing the former's performance, and eſpecially that on the Grammar, he let us ſee, there was like twenty errors in every page, and all the reſt of his work ſhewed he had no judgement in the matter. Our new overſeer immediately propoſed to get Dutch preſſmen, and we immediately ſent him to Holland to fetch them over; and in the mean time our old overſeer was continued till the other's return, and, knowing he was to be no longer employed, he committed rather greater blunders than formerly: but before our new overſeer went away, being acquainted with the King's printers, informed them of the advantageous offers we had made him, and his errand to Holland; whereupon they debauched him likewiſe, and told him, that if he gave us his tools (as he had promiſed to do on our paying for them), he would throw himſelf out of bread; and that the univerſity's leaſe would not be worth an half-penny to us, becauſe they were to lead an injunction againſt it. It evidently appeared, he was in concert with the King's printers, by the people he brought over with him; one of whom was a ſuperanuated ſailor, who ingenuouſly confeſſed his ignorance; and, after eight days ſtay with us, went home again, although he was under contract for a year at weekly wages. Another of them, to excuſe his ignorance, told us he was bred a baker, and had been but two years at the preſs. The other two were father and ſon; the father

was

was a little old man between ſixty and ſeventy years of age, and both ſo weakly, that they took four pulls at the preſs inſtead of two that the Engliſh made, who mocking them for their practice in their buſineſs, the ſon, being aſhamed, ran away from us in two months. Our new overſeer, being along with them at Cambridge, and having no other plates to work upon, but the former uncorrect ones (which he himſelf had condemned) cauſed caſt off a ſheet, which he ſent up to London, and which met with approbation; having done his utmoſt to ſave his own reputation, and conceal the ignorance of thoſe he had brought from Holland. After this, my partners uſed their preſſing inſtances to perſuade me to go down to Cambridge, which I refuſed till the contracts ſhould be ſigned, and the transference made. But telling me, that would take a time, and that the people would be out of work, they gave me an holograph write of John James, ſigned by him and Fenner, wherein they confirmed to me £ 100 to be paid yearly, or quarterly, for the uſe of my family; thirty ſhillings a week for my own ſubſiſtance; and likewiſe obliged themſelves to confirm to me one fourth of the profits that ſhould ariſe from the work, and to extend their obligation in form with all expedition, which, by their verbal promiſe, was to have been done within ſix weeks thereafter: having complained of their former payments, they aſſured me I ſhould be paid punctually for the future. But after ſeven weeks ſtay at Cambridge (Fenner having ſent down his brother to be caſhier), I had no greater payments made me than at

the

the rate of ten ſhillings *per* week: having made preſſing demands in terms of our agreement; this Fenner told me, that if I were not ſatisfied with what he gave, I might go about my buſineſs, for they could do the work without me. By this time having got a ſheet of a Bible made by the direction of this new overſeer, which appeared more beautiful then any hitherto done, Fenner, hearing me ſo much commend it, pretended to have a curioſity to look at it, but lifting it up from the place where it lay to a better light, dropt it; obſerving this, I ran to take up what might be unhurt, but he knocked even what remained whole to pieces, which ſhewed 'twas not an accident, but real deſign. I ſoon after diſcovered their plot: for, having placed all my tools and inſtruments in order at Cambridge, his brother at London and he thought they could do the buſineſs without me, and ſo ſought all opportunities to fall out with me; for it was plain from his breaking of my plates (the goodneſs of which was owing to our new overſeer's improving of the pages, and preſerving of ſuch pages as were ſufficient for the work), that, if they found they could ſucceed in their deſign, they would impoſe upon John James, by making him believe they could perform the work better than myſelf, and ſo have no more occaſion for me. This new overſeer ſtaid only ten days at this time that I was at Cambridge, when the meſſengers actually came down with the injunction; who having ſent for him, he kept them company all that night, and deſired them to conceal themſelves till he ſhould get

all

all that was due to him (which was only three guineas), and be gone for London, which he accordingly did next morning; and they appeared that afternoon, and laid on their injunction, which in few days after was removed by a decree of the chancery in favour of the univerſity. Our overſeer having now left us, this Fenner our clerk (being a few weeks before an ironmonger) aſſumed the direction as overſeer likewiſe; and made always choice of the worſt plates for the preſs-men to work on, and ſent theſe bad impreſſions to John James, which he ſhewed to ſtationers that he expected would be purchaſers, who attributed the faults of the impreſſion to the badneſs of the paper. Fenner having got already as much from John James as he could expect he would be willing to launch out on this affair; he made a demand of £ 500. for this paper, which Mr. James refuſed to pay his ſhare of, telling him that he was informed it was nothing but the refuſe and rubbiſh of his ſhop, and that he ought not to have furniſhed paper without the advice and conſent of the concerned, as had been agreed on by our minutes. Then Mr. Fenner applied to Mr. Mount and Mr. Page, who had a conſiderable mortgage on Mr. Baſket's privilege of printing; Mr. Baſket being to receive £ 11,000. due to him by the Government, with which he deſigned to pay off that mortgage: Fenner hearing of this, conjecturing this a proper time, made propoſals to conjoin Mr. Mount and Mr. Page with him in the univerſity's leaſe, which he had ſtill in his own name. Thereafter he came to Cambridge,

where I acquainted him how haughtily I had been uſed by his brother as is above related; and told him, I would go to London to ſee John James, and provide proper perſons to carry on the work, and have our contracts ſigned, which ought to have been done three months before that time. He told me, I ſhould get no more papers ſigned than what were already, for John James would advance no more money, and would be no longer concerned; but that he had taken care of himſelf, and was to take-in Mr. Mount and Mr. Page for ſharers. I then told him, I had his ſigned obligation for a fourth ſhare, and would go to London to let Mr. James know his deſign, who had already laid out ſo much money on that affair. Finding me obſtinate, he begged me to ſtay fourteen days, and make the Calendar of a Prayer-book, that he might have one of them bound in order to ſhew it to Mr. James, and that he would endeavour to get him to continue his concern, and to bring him to Cambridge in that time; which they failing to do, I went to London: but before I ſet out, I thought it fit to remove part of my tools, at leaſt ſo many of them as ſhould diſappoint him, or any other, in the diſcovery of any part of my invention. I likewiſe carried with me ſpecimens of moſt of the ſheets caſt off, to compare them with what Mr. James might have got ſent him from Fenner. Mr. James took out of his pocket thoſe ſheets ſent him by Fenner from Cambridge; amongſt which was one done upon fine paper and ſealed, as formerly ſpoke of, which he judged to be from the type,

and

and ſaid there was no compariſon between it and the other ſpecimens for beauty; and his brother Thomas James being preſent, and ſeconding the ſame, the ſheet was opened out, and my ſeal being found on the middle of it, they were both convinced that that impreſſion was from my plates, and that any defects they complained of in the others were owing to the inſufficiency of the paper. Next day I went to call for Fenner, but he would not appear. But hearing I was come to London, he went down the day after to Cambridge, where he and his brother impudently broke open my work-houſe-door, and finding the material part of my tools gone, applied to trades-men in the place, thinking to make up what was wanting; but he could not deſcribe, nor they conceive, what he meant, though he was there ſix weeks about it. When he came back to London, he perſuaded John James, that, could he have back my tools, he would make good the undertaking; and to that end he propoſed a meeting with me, to engage me to go back and replace my tools as they were before, and I ſhould be paid punctually thereafter. Theſe inſinuations ſo far prevailed with John James, that he went into the concert with Fenner againſt me, and gave him fifty guineas as part of his ſhare of the £ 500. for paper above-mentioned: when we met, I deſired to get from Mr. Hamilton the contract in his hands to be ſigned; and that Mr. Fenner ſhould transfer the privilege of the univerſity. This they declined, and ſaid they would make another paper equally valid, which John James wrote him-

ſelf, and which was a contract for twenty-ſix weeks in place of twenty-one years. By this I perceived that their deſign was only to get me to carry back my tools, to be more attentive to my performance for diſcovery of the myſtery, and then to ſhuffle me entirely out of the buſineſs.

In the twenty-ſix weeks time, they expected I would finiſh the half of a Bible, and the half of an Octavo Prayer-book. I told them I ſaw through their aim, and parted with them. Then Fenner went a ſecond time to Cambridge, and practiſed for two months with as little ſucceſs as before: at his return, he called us to another meeting; and I carried along with me a country-man of mine, a member of parliament, to whom they offered a ſheet of clean paper, to fill up what articles he thought fit for my advantge, if I would return to Cambridge. This gentleman anſwered, that I had a friend in the place that underſtood matters of that kind better than he, and deſired them to appoint an hour and place; but accidently dropping his name, was known to Mr. Fenner, having heard him plead a cauſe in the Exchequer in Scotland: when the defendant was ſeemingly to have loſt his cauſe, this gentleman recovered it to Fenner's great ſurprize; which made him believe that gentleman would be too many for him to meet with on my affair. The appointment, however, was made; but neither he nor James kept it. Some days after, my friend the member of parliament and I met with them in another place, where were the two James's and Fenner. Thomas James, being the intimate

intimate of Mr. Mount and Mr. Page, was informed by them, how far Fenner had been bargaining with them for the privilege of the univerſity; which John James hearing, told Fenner that he was a knave and a rogue, and had all along picked his pocket, but that he would ſtrip him to the ſhirt for his money. After this, my friend and I gave over hopes of getting matters accommodated; but he went to my Lord Iſlay (by whoſe aſſiſtance we had obtained the leaſe, which was granted ſolely for the encouragement of my plate-way), to ſolicit his lordſhip to intercede with the gentlemen of the univerſity for redreſs of my bad treatment. But this viſit was unluckily timed; for one Mr. Page an attorney (his lordſhip's doer at London, and likewiſe for Fenner) being preſent, and hearing application made to his lordſhip in my behalf, ſaid, I had been ſufficiently rewarded for what I had done; that I had got £700. of their money, and that I was old and blind, and that my partners could perform my undertaking to better purpoſe than I could do myſelf. After this, my friend and I made it our buſineſs to meet with this attorney, when I had my accompts drawn up, to ſhew him how far he had been miſinformed. But he would by no means meet with us, ſaying, Did we imagine to ſeduce him from his client's intereſt? and that he would affront my friend, if we gave him any farther trouble. My friend being obliged to go for Scotland, I never had an opportunity to give my Lord Iſlay any farther account of my misfortunes. I went afterwards to Cambridge, to look after my houſehold

furniture, and the remainder of my tools that I left behind me; but Fenner pretended to detain both furniture and tools for what of the latter I had carried off before, though at the ſame time my partners were debtor unto me in £ 240. by their engagements to me, beſides my ſhare of the plates and profits ariſing from them. I could by no means prevail with Fenner to let me have my furniture, tools, or my cabinet where my papers lay. When I came back to London, another friend of mine and I met with Fenner, to whom we propoſed to ſubmit our difference to the determination of two gentlemen, to be choſen by each of us; to which he anſwered, that he was content, provided I would find bail for what demands he might have on me; to which my friend replied, that I ſhould find bail for £ 5000. yea, £ 10,000. if he would do the ſame but for £ 2000. But Fenner, hearing this frank offer of my friend and me, declined the ſubmiſſion; upon which a ſubſtantial neighbour of his being preſent, told him, that certainly his cauſe muſt be bad, that he would not truſt to the arbitration of two honeſt men. Before I left Cambridge laſt, I was informed by one of my countrymen who wrought in the houſe, that they had printed off 20,000 copies of a ſmall Prayer-book of one line, 10,000 of another Prayer-book of two columns, from my plates made from the ſame type; and 10,000 more of an octavo Prayer-book of a larger letter, the one half whereof from plates, and the other from types; beſides 10,000 Bibles in manner of this laſt mentioned Prayer-book, which

when

when working in the common-way, one third of theſe types were picked out, Thomas James having underſized them when he undertook to adjuſt them, though I had all along wrought my plates from theſe unſized types. After all, I took counſel of Commiſſary Graves at Cambridge, and Mr. Peters counſellor at London, whom John James had likewiſe adviſed with; and both agreed that we ſhould join in proſecuting Fenner; which Mr. James conſented to, but ſhifted me off ſo often that I could not wait longer at London: and thus I was obliged to leave my affair in the ſame ſituation, and come home to Scotland, without ever having been able ever ſince to get redreſs or ſatisfaction for the injuries done me by my partners.

W. GED.

II. Supplementary Narrative of Ged and his Invention;

Written by his Daughter.

Mr. William Ged, who was a goldſmith in Edinburgh, had been for ſome years concerned in paying a relation's printing-houſe ſervants, and in his abſence often thought how much money might be ſaved, and how cheap Bibles and Common-prayer-books might be bought, could a method be fallen upon to make plates for each page; and being aſſured by a good printer of the advantage that would accrue, he immediately turned all his invention that way, and gave up exceeding good buſineſs, by which he had maintained his family very genteelly, and had ſaved money. He had alſo improved the Goldſmith buſineſs in many branches, which he liberally communicated to the trade as ſoon as he made them. But now he turned all his attention to making plates for printing, and threw out much money upon making very expenſive experiments, and ſeveral years painful and hard labour; and at length obtained it with the cheapeſt and eaſieſt-got materials.

By this time his own ſtock was gone. But a friend of his, who had money, and wiſhed to ſerve both him and himſelf by this improvement, joined him; but neither had knowledge in printing, nor could procure proper work that would do juſtice to the performance.

All

All were in arms againſt it; which induced Mr. Ged to cloſe with Mr. William Fenner, an Engliſhman, who was in Edinburgh at the time. The narrative dictated by himſelf can beſt explain how he was uſed there, and continued till 1733, when he came home, and the bad ſucceſs he had met with; which proceeded from no failure on his part, but his credulity. His friends, however, were anxious to have a ſpecimen of his performance printed here; which was at laſt done by ſubſcription. But the difficulty of a compoſitor ſtill remained, and none could be got to do it; his ſon James Ged being then about ten or twelve years old, it was thought proper to breed him a printer; and he was not much above a year at the buſineſs, when, with the conſent of his maſter, he was allowed to come in the night-time, when all the other compoſitors were gone, and ſet up the forms for his father to caſt off the plates from; by which means Salluſt was finiſhed 1736. A number of the copies ſtill remain unſold. Mr. William Ged, while at Cambridge, had the fortune to be known to ſome very reſpectful perſons there, who regretted much his uſage, and wanted much to have him replaced printer again, in which Mr. Robert Smith chancellor, and the biſhop of St. Aſaph, were very powerful agents; which encouraged Mr. Ged and a gentleman of property (who was to join him in carrying on the printing) to go to Cambridge 1742. But it happened ſo unlucky, that the univerſity had juſt before that provided themſelves in a great quantity of new types, which they wiſhed to make experiment of at that

time. His ſon James Ged, wearied with many diſappointments, went off in 1745, was apprehended in Carliſle, and condemned with colonel Townley; but, through Dr. Robert Smith's intereſt with the duke of Newcaſtle (upon his father's account) and ſome others, was reprieved; and after being liberate 1748, there were gentlemen under contract with Mr. William Ged to have him come up to London, as his ſon James was a ſufficient printer; which he was upon the eve of doing, and had all his utenſils new fit up, and ſent for Leith to be ſhipped of, when he ſickened, and died October 19, 1749. Thus ended a very laborious, innocent life, and he had fortitude to bear himſelf up amidſt his many ſevere trials and diſappointments with chearfulneſs. I muſt not omit one proof he gave of the love of his country, and his diſdain of enriching himſelf at his country's expence. He had offers from Holland, repeatedly, either to go over there, or ſell them his invention; but he would not liſten, as he ſaid he meant to ſerve his own country, and not to hurt it, as it muſt have done, enabling them to underſell by that advantage. After Mr. Ged died, his ſon James Ged got up all his tools to London, and the gentlemen engaged would have carried on buſineſs with him; but he had not ſo much of his father's genius as his younger brother William Ged, who, being likewiſe tired with repeated diſappointment in his father's invention, though he had the genius for it, left the place, and went to Jamaica, where he did well and was much eſteemed; and as ſoon as he had made ſome hundred pounds,

pounds, remitted the money to his brother James at London, to buy a font of types, and bring over all his father's utenſils with him, as he knew he could perform it; unluckily Mr. James left the tools to be ſhipped by a friend of his, who moſt ungenerouſly kept them to make trial of his ſkill himſelf in that way, and the tools were never heard of more; which was no ſmall diſappointment to William, and what he regretted to his laſt hour, 1767. His brother James died the year after he left England.

III. An Account of ſome of the Advantages of that Improvement in the ART of PRINTING, invented by WILLIAM GED, late Goldſmith in Edinburgh; with PROPOSALS of a SUBSCRIPTION for enabling his Son, JAMES GED, Printer, and now the only Poſſeſſor of this Valuable Secret, to carry it into farther Execution, for the PUBLICK, and the Benefit of his Family. Dated London, May 29, 1751.

RECEIVED of *the Sum of* *to be depoſited in the Hands of* *, for a Fund to enable me to carry on my* Art of Printing by Plates; *which Sum I oblige myſelf to repay out of the Profits of my Work.*

THE nature of this Improvement in the Art of Printing being ſo little known, it is thought proper to give the following ſhort account of it:

As to the Invention itſelf, it conſiſts ſimply in this; That Mr. Ged, from any types, of Greek or Roman, or any other character, forms a plate for every page, or ſheet of a book, from which he prints, inſtead of uſing a type from every letter, as is done in the common way.

The improvement upon the Art, by this curious invention, is principally conſiderable in relation to the Three moſt important articles of Printing, viz. The *Expence*, *Correctneſs*, and *Beauty and Uniformity of the letter*.

1ſt, The

1ſt, The ſaving on types appears remarkably, no more being neceſſary for making plates for any book than what are requiſite for compoſing only one ſheet. When the firſt half ſheet is compoſed, Mr. Ged makes his plates for it while the ſecond half ſheet is compoſing: The types of the firſt half ſheet are then taken down and made uſe of for the third, whilſt plates are made for the ſecond, and ſo on till the book be finiſhed; with much leſs interruption than in the common way of printing, in which the compoſitors are frequently ſtopped for want of types, till large impreſſions of a former ſheet are thrown off: but Mr. Ged's method is not liable to this interruption, he being able to make plates for one half ſheet in leſs than two hours, which affords an immediate return of types to the compoſitors.

In making plates, the types being neither ſtrained by a preſs, nor clogged with ink, as in printing from them, are not in danger of being broke, nor do they ſuſtain any preſſure that can wear them; by this means the charge of types, which uſed to be ſo great, becomes next to nothing, from the ſmall quantity required, and the laſting of ſuch as are neceſſary.

The expence in printing will be much diminiſhed by ſaving on the article of paper. In the common way, there muſt be ſome hundreds and frequently thouſands of copies of a book thrown off at firſt, to anſwer the common charge of the preſs, which, if the book be long in ſelling, occaſions a conſiderable loſs from the intereſt of money given out for paper and preſs-mens wages: whereas, in this method by plates,

100, 50, 20, or any number of copies may be thrown off, according to the briſkneſs or ſlowneſs of the ſale.

Upon theſe accounts the charge of a book, which bears but one edition, may be more eaſily defrayed than in the common way of Printing; but in books that run through many, and in all ſtandard and claſſical books, for which this improvement is chiefly intended, how obvious and conſiderable is the advantage! For, after the common charges are defrayed, by printing off conſiderably fewer copies than is generally done in the firſt edition of books, every copy afterwards caſt off will not amount to the twentieth part of the charge of a copy in the ſecond and ſubſequent editions reprinted in the common way; all the expence of compoſing, correcting, and new types, being by this method entirely ſaved, together with the intereſt upon paper and preſs-mens wages as aforeſaid.

2*dly*, Books printed in this way muſt more infallibly be correct; for where an error happens, and errors will ſometimes eſcape the moſt exact corrector, they can eaſily be amended upon the firſt diſcovery. Words, and even ſentences (provided they can be contained in the ſame bounds with thoſe to be taken out) can be corrected without deſtroying the plate; at the worſt, the charge of plates for a few pages is very inconſiderable: and when a book is once correct, which from this facility it is natural to expect it ſoon may be, it remains ſo for ever; whereas in the common way of printing there is as great, or perhaps greater, hazard of *errata* in the ſecond and following editions as in the firſt.

3*dly*, Mr.

3dly, Mr. Ged, by repeated experiments, has ſhewn to conviction, that there is no diſtinguiſhing the print from his plates from that of the types from whence theſe plates were formed: ſo that it is plain, the print by his plates muſt be as beautiful as Field's, Bleau's, Elzivir's, or any of the moſt celebrated printers, provided the types from which the plates are made be equally good with theirs. And here it is natural to obſerve, the very beſt types will always fall reaſonably to be uſed, ſo few being neceſſary; the letter will be beautiful and uniform through the whole book, as clear in the laſt page as in the firſt, every plate having only its own work. This is not the caſe in printing with types, which are employed ſheet after ſheet till they are worn out, and occaſions that inequality of beauty which ſo often appears in the end of books of great length.

Mr. Ged, the inventor of this ingenious and uſeful improvement, by an unwearied application for many years, in which he had occaſion to make trial of an almoſt infinite variety of experiments, at laſt brought it to perfection: but, by a fatality not uncommon to men of merit and ingenuity, he never reaped the fruits of his own induſtry. After ſtruggling many years with great difficulties, always baffled in his expectations by ſome misfortune or other, he died about a year ago amidſt a deſerving family, in very indifferent circumſtances, by his large expences in the unſucceſsful proſecution of his diſcovery, and ſuch as has put it out of his ſon's power to carry it on without aſſiſtance.

By

By the help of this ſon, whom he bred a printer, and to whom alone he taught his art, Mr. Ged compleated plates for a Salluſt, which he actually printed, at Edinburgh, in the year 1736; and though the badneſs of the types (the only types he could then obtain) from which theſe plates were formed, made it impoſſible for him to make the impreſſion remarkably beautiful; yet the many copies of it in the hands of the curious ſerve at leaſt as a convincing and indiſputable proof of the reality of the improvement in general. It is hoped, that the world will no longer allow this deſerving family to languiſh in obſcurity while one of them is poſſeſſed of a ſecret ſo apparently uſeful, and which, in the event of his death, would be loſt for ever to the publick.

It is humbly propoſed, That gentlemen, lovers of learning, and encouragers of ingenuity, will have the goodneſs to open a ſubſcription, to enable James Ged, the ſon of the inventor, to proſecute his father's art. He has all the tools, but much ſpoiled by diſuſe; moſt of them need to be repaired, and many to be entirely renewed: but for this, and all other expences neceſſary for carrying on the work, it is propoſed, the ſubſcribers ſhould agree upon ſome perſon to receive and have charge of the money ſubſcribed, which ſhall not be laid out but with his knowledge and approbation: and Mr. Ged will give all the ſecurity in his power that the gentlemen ſubſcribers ſhall be gradually reimburſed out of the profits of his work, in ſuch proportions as they ſhall think proper.

IV.

IV. Mr. Mores's Narrative of Block-Printing.

From his Dissertation on Founders.

THE method of Block-printing, firſt practiſed by the Chineſe and Japoneſe, and purſued in the firſt eſſays of Fauſt, the European inventor of the preſent art, before the more excellent method of printing by ſeparate types had been deviſed by him and Schoeffer, was performed by engraving the matter upon blocks of wood, every block containing a page of the work which was to be printed; and in this manner was printed the *Speculum Morientium*, and other maculatures of the art.

About the year 1730 *, one Fenner took it into his head to revive this ancient method, but with improvement: inſtead of planks and engraving, he uſed caſting and plates of metal. Thus; the matter was firſt compoſed in the uſual way: then the form was affuſed with ſome ſort of Gypſum, which, after it was indurated, became a complication of matrices for caſting the whole page in a ſingle piece.

* Ged's plan was firſt put in execution in 1725; his connexion with Fenner commenced in 1729, and it continued till 1733. N.

The project required money, which Fenner wanted: ſo Mr. John James (the brother of Mr. Thomas James) then an architect at Greenwich *, was taken into the ſcheme, and afterwards Mr. Thomas James himſelf; and the partnerſhip at length conſiſted of

Mr. John James,
Mr. Thomas James,
The ſaid Fenner, and
James Gadd [Ged];

the laſt of whom was in the rebellion of 1745, a captain in Perth's regiment, was arraigned of high treaſon, pleaded guilty, and begged to be recommended to mercy: and his life was ſpared on account of his knowledge in this method of printing which was thought to be uſeful †.

In the purſuit Mr. Thomas James expended a conſiderable part of his fortune, and ſuffered in his proper buſineſs ‡: for the printers would not employ

* John James was conſiderably employed in the works at Greenwich, where he ſettled. He built the church there, and the houſe of Sir Gregory Page at Black-heath, the idea of which was taken from Houghton. James likewiſe built the church of St. George, Hanover Square, the body of the church at Twickenham, and that of St. Luke, Middleſex, which has a ſlanted obeliſk for its ſteeple. He tranſlated from the French ſome books on Gardening. See Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting, vol. IV. p. 48.

† See his Siſter's Narrative, p. 26.

‡ "His death," ſays Mr. Mores, "which happened in "the year 1738, was accelerated by an unlucky attach- "ment to a method of printing long ſince rejected, and at "variance with the improvements of latter times."

him

him becauſe the Block-printing, had it ſucceeded, would have been prejudicial to theirs.

But the hiſtory of their progreſs is briefly comprehended in two letters which are owing to this publication;

" Reverend Sir,

" I am adding One to the number of typographical hiſtorians: but my ſubject is a branch only of that hiſtory which has not been treated on profeſſedly before.

" In the proſecution of it I have occaſion to ſpeak of the method of Block-printing: or that of printing by caſt plates inſtead of ſingle types, a method which received greater encouragement at Cambridge, than it hath been honoured with in any other place.

" I have now before me a printed addreſs to The Univerſity, ſigned John James and Company, humbly ſuing for the privilege of printing Bibles and Common-prayer-books by this method. The addreſs has no other date than this chronological circumſtance to aſcertain its time, that it was made about three years after The Univerſity had granted their (then) laſt leaſe to The Company of Stationers, which I conjecture was about the year 1736, and I apprehend that The Univerſity condeſcended to their requeſt: for I remember to have been told ſome years ago by a ſtraggling workman who had wrought there, that both Bibles and Common-prayer-books had been printed, but that the compoſitors when they cor-

rected one fault (which was only to be done by perforation) made purposely half a dozen more, and the press-men when the masters were absent battered the letter in aid of the compositors: in consequence of which base proceedings, the books were suppressed by authority, and condemned to *et piper & quicquid, &c.* and that all the chandleries in Cambridge were full of James's Bibles, and that the plates were sent to the King's printing-house, and from thence to Mr. Caslon's founding-house to be melted; an inspector standing at the furnace to see the order fully executed."

"This, Sir, is all that I have heard of the matter; and if any thing is untrue or defective, be so kind as to correct or add.

"What I particularly desire to know is,

1. Whether Mr. John James was the first who engaged in this attempt; or whether * * * * * [*this query was founded on a mistake: a supposition that Mr. John James here mentioned was Mr. John James the Letter-Founder. He was not; he was the Uncle of our Founder.*]

2. Who was the inventor: for the invention (if a revival may be called an invention) was not their own.

3. The method by which they cast such large plates and small letter so truly, if the same be not yet a secret.

4. The dates necessary to render the foregoing account more complete.

5. Whether they printed any thing beſides Bibles and Common-prayer-books; for I have the plate from which the encloſed page of Salluſt * was printed: it was given me by a gentleman of Cambridge, who cannot recollect how he came by it; it ſeems to have received a ſtroke from the wrong end of the ball-ſtocks, and to confirm the teſtimony of the ſtraggler." * * * * * *

In anſwer to which thus writes *The Reverend Dr. Richardſon, Maſter of Emanuel,* and with a preciſion which we have not met with before: for the ſcience of typography, although formerly exerciſed by ſcholars, and now certainly is an appendage of a ſcholar, is but little underſtood by thoſe who uſe it.

"The firſt application which was made to the Univerſity by James and Company for printing Bibles and Common-prayer-books by blocks inſtead of ſingle types was early in the year 1730, for I find that a ſyndicate was appointed to treat with him 6 June in that year; who, being ſtrangers to the buſineſs of printing, made ſo favourable a repreſentation to the ſenate, that a leaſe was ſealed to him 23 April, 1731. In their attempt to ſucceed, the partners ſunk a pretty large ſum of money; but I do not find

* Mr. Mores, when he wrote this letter, was not aware, that the whole volume of Salluſt had been printed from blocks. The page which Mr. M. has exhibited as a ſpecimen had been greatly injured before it came into his poſſeſſion. N.

that

that they completed any one book * by *block*. One, I think, was carried on for ſome time, but finiſhed by types at laſt. After fruitleſs attempts for three or four years, the thing was given up, and application was made to The Univerſity for a freſh leaſe to print Bibles, &c. in the common-way, 23 Sept. 1735; and this was refuſed.—I do not find what rent was paid. If any, it was very conſiderable: for when I was in office in the year 1738, finding a large arrear due, by uſing ſome threatning expreſſions I recovered £50. took up the old leaſe, and ſo had done with them.

"One Fenner was the principal perſon concerned, and the projector of the ſcheme: James was an architect, and lived at Greenwich, and was taken into partnerſhip as having money. Fenner died inſolvent in or before the year 1735, for it was his widow † who applied for a new leaſe in that year.

"Theſe

* By Ged's Narrative (ſee p. 12.) it appears that they had *finiſhed* two Prayer-books. N.

† Mrs. Fenner was afterwards married to Mr. Waugh, an apothecary, whom ſhe ſurvived. At a ſale of her effects in 1768, I purchaſed a quantity of waſte metal which had been many years accumulating; among this parcel was a great variety of metal blocks. One of theſe (a hand-bill for Dr. Stoughton's Cordial Elixir) I have preſerved: and have alſo by me an accidental curioſity; a ſmall lump dug out of the ruins occaſioned by the conflagration in White Fryars, Jan. 30, 1712-13; which, by having been compreſſed

"These Sir, are all the particulars which I can recollect relating to this affair." * * * * *

In respect to the design itself, we may observe that the fears of the printers were groundless, and the villainy of the workmen supererogatory: for had the enterprize at first succeeded, it must soon have sunk under its own burthen: the difficulty of botching an error which having escaped the eye of the most vigilant corrector might casually be stumbled upon by an abecedarian; the great weight of metal and dead money; the capacity of stowage for that metal; the care which must be taken in repositing the plates, as an ill-fated stroke would spoil a whole page; the more than ordinary wear of the exterior letters of the form, which would spoil a whole page likewise; the conclusive bomb-dab of a finished pressman at the end of his beat, so notoriously destructive to a standing job, would all contribute to render a design abortive which hath only this advantage to boast, that a man may be a printer without a single letter in his house. Add to this, that the *cast* being three descents removed from its parent the sharpness of the letter is obtunded, and the beauty of the prototype is vanished away.

Ged, after he had obtained his pardon, followed his business for some time as a journeyman with Mr.

compressed between two solid substances, exhibits on its opposite sides what Mr. Mores would have called, an impression *en creux*, and *en relief*. See Diff. on Founders, p. 67. N.

Bettenham:

Bettenham: afterwards he commenced maſter for himſelf at a houſe in Denmark-court in the Strand; unſucceſsful there, he privately ſhipped off himſelf and his materials for the other ſide of the Atlantic; and, whether it were that having eſcaped the one fatality he met with the other we know not*; but nothing hath ſince been heard of him. E. R. M.

* Mr. Mores was but little acquainted with the perſonal hiſtory and misfortunes of James Ged. He went to Jamaica, where his younger brother was ſettled as a reputable printer, and died ſoon after his arrival at that iſland. See p. 26. N.

*** *In the* Running-titles *of pages* 29, 30, *and* 32, *read* "JAMES GED'S Narrative."

FINIS.

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